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County, LANL consider colocation space

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One of the optional budget items the Los Alamos County Council tentatively approved Tuesday night was \$50,000 from the Economic Development Fund to help finance an incubation colocate workspace.

The proposed space – named Project Y, Cowork Los Alamos – is a collaboration between the Los Alamos Commerce and Development Corporation, Los Alamos National Laboratory's Richard P. Feynman Center for Innovation, Central Park Square and possibly the county – provided the funding tentatively approved Tuesday remains in the final budget.

Los Alamos County Economic Vitality Administrator Greg Fisher called colocate spaces “the rage around the country.”

“The county’s been searching for a small business niche for some time, that wouldn’t put all the burden on the county, and it really is relevant to the modern business world,” Fisher said. LACDC has already committed \$75,000 and LANL’s Feynman Center and Community Programs Office have pledged \$30,000. Central Park Square’s in-kind donation provides reduced rent for the venture. The group also plans to seek grants and corporate sponsors.

The cost of the one-year pilot project is \$150,000. During that year, LACDC hopes to prove that such a space is economically viable and “beneficial to building our entrepreneurial ecosystem in Los Alamos.”

“We’re a little unsure of the demand,” said LACDC Executive Director Patrick Sullivan. “These things are booming across the country. It’s a little hard to judge here. We’ve had a little bit of initial feedback that’s been very positive.”

According to Sullivan, there are currently 9,500 colocate spaces worldwide and the number is expected to grow to 35,000 by 2021.

The space will be geared toward a wide range of users: entrepreneurs, freelancers, young professionals, small business, visiting corporate employees, LANL staff, LANL strategic partners and youth. “It’s a place to come and work in a creative community environment where we hope that collisions will occur between the different types of people there...and create a sense of community and collaboration and exchange of ideas.” Sullivan said.

The 2,400-square-foot facility at 150 Central Park Square will include a large open collaborative space, a private meeting room available for rent, a kitchen and “phone booths” for private conversations. The idea is to create an environment “that inspires innovation and nurtures creativity.”

Project Y will be more than a workspace. Weekly and monthly programming will be a major aspect of the venture.

Weekly events will include TED Talks lunches and video chats with national investors. Local service providers and business support organizations such as attorneys, accountants and

insurance brokers will be invited to hold office hours at the facility and serve as a resource for entrepreneurs. The group also hopes to entice the University of New Mexico-Los Alamos to offer a course there.

Monthly events will include two-hour educational sessions on topics such as lean startup, starting a company, successful entrepreneur roundtables and LANL senior manager roundtables.

Coffee and entrepreneur pitches will bring entrepreneurs together to pitch their companies to each other and get feedback.

Sullivan described an event LACDC held recently which could serve as a prototype for similar events. A crowd of 50 people attended a talk by a national venture capitalist, after which 13 local businesses seeking investment gave their 90-second elevator pitches. Seven of those had private meetings with the investor the next day.

Backers hope that groups such as the Los Alamos Entrepreneurs Network, the LANL Post Doc Association and even creative groups such as the Pajarito Film Club will meet there.

"This is right in the middle of the creative district. So we'd like to bring the creatives into this," Sullivan said.

LANL and LACDC are also brainstorming on forming a Young Professionals Networking group.

"So we'll have all these different groups using the facility, creating activity there and creating it as kind of a nexus of entrepreneurship within the community," Sullivan said.

Project Y will also host larger events, such as Startup Weekend Los Alamos, a Teen Startup event that LACDC and the lab plan to launch this summer and hackathons, which Sullivan described as events where members of the coding community spend a weekend locked in a room working on difficult coding problems.

LACDC has already hired someone to run the facility.

"These types of facilities are successful based on the PR and marketing that are around them, and then the content and the quality of the programming that they provide, just as much as the space they provide," Sullivan said. "And I think we found someone that will be very successful with that."

Councilor David Izraelevitz asked about how the Diamond Mix coworking space fit into the picture. According to Sullivan, that venture has closed.

"What we're focusing on is a space in the middle of downtown, close to other amenities that people want," Sullivan said. "There will be a very coordinated marketing campaign. We have a 13-month calendar of events and programming that we've laid out. There will be ongoing extent educational opportunities there. So it's a little bit of a different animal."

The anticipated launch date for Project Y is June 1. If the pilot is successful, the partners plan to develop a long-term vision and possibly consider a larger location.

This article was originally published in the [Los Alamos Monitor](#).

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